

A Nenets Fairy Tale



Translated by Irina Zheleznova

KOTURA, LORD OF THE WINDS

Illustrated by N. Korneyeva



Long, long ago, in a nomad camp, there lived an old man with his three daughters, the youngest of whom was the kindest and cleverest of the three.

The old man was very poor. His choom, his tent of skins, was worn and full of holes, and there was little warm clothing to wear. When the frost was very fierce the old man would huddle by the fire with his three daughters and try to keep warm. At night, before going to bed, they would put out the fire and shiver from the cold until morning.



Once, in the middle of winter, a terrible snowstorm came down on the tundra. The wind blew for a day, it blew for a second day, and it blew for a third day, and it seemed as if all the chooms would be blown away. The people dared not show their faces outside and sat in the chooms, hungry and cold.



So too, the old man and his three daughters. They sat in the choom and listened to the storm raging, and the old man said:

"We'll never be able to sit out this blizzard. It was sent by Kotura, Lord of the Winds. He sounds angry and must be waiting for us to send him a good wife. You, my eldest daughter, must go to Kotura or else all our people will perish. You must go and beg him to stop the blizzard."



"How can I go to him?" the girl asked "I don't know the way."

"I will give you a little sledge. Place it so that it faces the wind, give it a push and follow it. The wind will untie the strings of your coat, but you must not stop to tie them. The snow will get into your shoes, but you must not stop to shake it out. Never pause till you reach a tall mountain. Climb it, and when you get to the top, then only can you stop to shake out the snow from your shoes and tie the strings on your coat. By and by a little bird will fly up to you and perch on your shoulder. Do not chase it away, be kind to it and fondle it gently. Then get into your sledge and coast down the mountain. The sledge will bring you

straight to the door of Kotura's choom. Enter the choom, but touch nothing, just sit there and wait. When Kotura comes, do all he tells you to."



Eldest Daughter put on her furs, placed the sledge her father gave her so that it faced the wind, and sent it gliding along with a push.

She walked after it a little way, and the strings on her coat came undone, the snow got into her shoes and she was very, very cold. She did not do as her father bade but stopped and began to tie the strings of her coat and to shake the snow out of her shoes.



After that she moved on, in the face of the wind. She walked a long time till at last she saw a tall mountain. No sooner had she climbed it than a little bird flew up to her and was about to perch on her shoulder. But Eldest Daughter waved her hands to chase it off, and the bird circled over her for a little while and then flew away.



Eldest Daughter got into her sledge and coasted down the mountainside, and the sledge stopped by a large choom.

The girl came inside and looked about her, and the first thing she saw was a large piece of roasted venison. She made up a fire, warmed herself and began to tear pieces of fat off the meat.



She would tear off a piece and eat it, and then tear off another and eat it too, and she had eaten her fill when all of a sudden she heard someone coming up to the choom. The skin that hung over the entrance was lifted, and a young giant entered. This was Kotura himself. He looked at Eldest Daughter and said:

"Where do you come from, woman, and what do you want here?"

"My father sent me to you," answered Eldest Daughter.

"Why did he do that?"

"So that you would take me to wife."



"I was out hunting and have brought back some meat. Stand up now and cook it for me," Kotura said.

Eldest Daughter did as she was told, and when the meat was ready, Kotura told her to take it out of the pot and divide it in two parts.

"You and I will eat one half of the meat," he said, "and you will put the other half in a wooden dish and take it to the neighbouring choom. Do not go into the choom yourself but wait at the entrance. An old woman will come out to you. Give her the meat and wait till she brings back the empty dish."



Eldest Daughter took the meat and went outside. The wind was howling and the snow falling, and it was quite dark. How could one find anything in such a storm!... Eldest Daughter walked off a little way, stopped, thought a while and then threw the meat, in the snow. After that she came back to Kotura with the empty dish.



Kotura glanced at her.

"Have you given our neighbours the meat?" he asked.

"Yes, I have," Eldest Daughter replied.

"Show me the dish, I want to see what they gave you in return."

Eldest Daughter showed him the empty dish, but Kotura said nothing. He ate his share of the meat and went to bed.

In the morning he rose, brought some untanned deerskins into the choom and said:

"While I am out hunting, dress these skins and make me a new coat out of them and new shoes and mittens, I will put them on when I come back and see just how clever you are with your hands."



And with these words, Kotura went off to hunt in the tundra, and Eldest Daughter set to work. Suddenly the hanging of skin over the entrance lifted, and a grey-haired old woman came in.

"Something has got into my eye, child," said she. "See if you can take it out."

"I have no time to bother with you," answered Eldest Daughter, "I am busy."



The old woman said nothing but turned away and went out of the choom. Eldest Daughter was left alone, She dressed the skins hastily and began cutting them with a knife, hurrying to get her work finished by evening. Indeed, in such a hurry was she that she did not even try to make the clothes nicely. She had no needle to sew with and only one day to do the work in, and she could hardly get anything done at all.

It was evening when Kotura came back.

"Are my new clothes ready?" he asked her.

"They are," Eldest Daughter replied.

Kotura took the clothes, he ran his hands over them, and the skins felt rough to his touch, so badly were they dressed. He looked, and he saw that the garments were poorly cut, sewn together carelessly and much too small for him.

At this he became very angry and threw Eldest Daughter out of the choom. He threw her far, far out, and she fell into a drift of snow and lay there till she froze to death.

And the howling of the wind became fiercer than ever.



The old man sat in his choom, he listened to the wind howling and the storm raging day in and day out and said:

"Eldest Daughter did not heed my words, she did not do as I bade. That is why the wind does not stop howling. Kotura is angry. You must go to him, my second daughter."

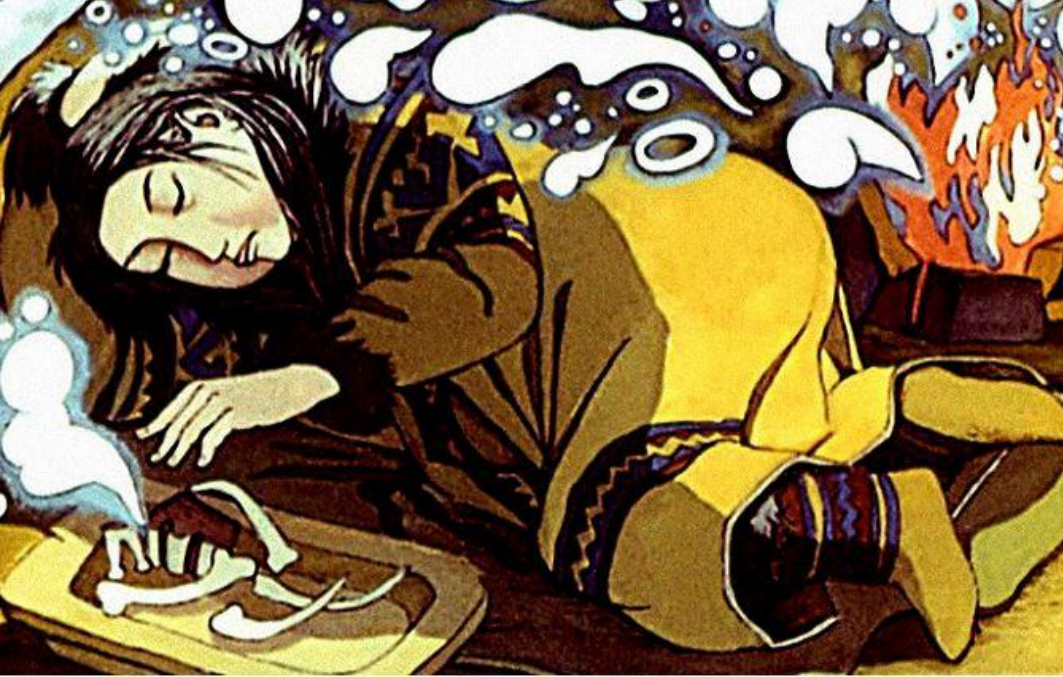
The old man made a little sledge, he told Second Daughter just what he had told Eldest Daughter, and he sent her off to Kotura. And himself he remained in the choom with his youngest daughter and waited for the blizzard to stop.



Second Daughter placed the sledge so that it faced the wind, and, giving it a push, went along after it. The strings of her coat came undone as she walked and the snow got into her shoes. She was very cold, and, forgetting her father's behest, shook the snow out of her shoes and tied the strings of her coat sooner than he had told her to.



She came to the mountain and climbed it, and, seeing the little bird, waved her hands and chased it away. Then she got into her sledge and coasted down the mountainside straight up to Kotura's choom.



She entered the choom, made up a fire, had her fill of venison and sat down to wait for Kotura.



Kotura came back from his hunting, he saw Second Daughter and asked her:

"Why have you come to me?"

"My father sent me to you," replied Second Daughter.

"Why did he do that?"

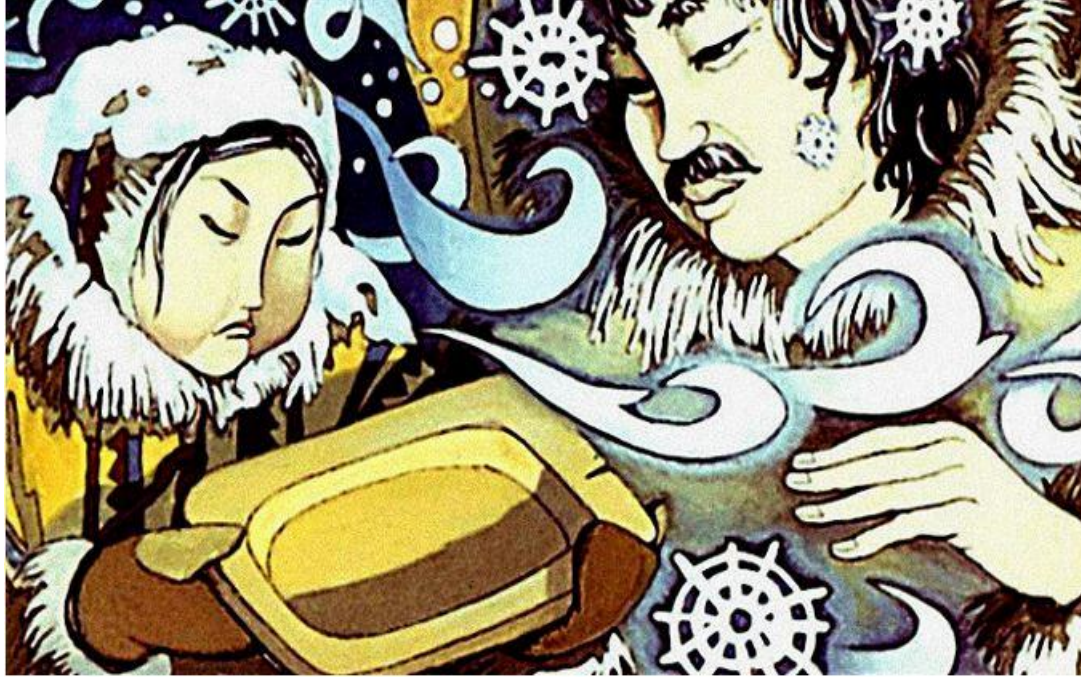
"So that you would take me to wife."

"Why do you sit there, then I am hungry, be quick and cook me some meat."



When the meat was ready, Kotura ordered Second Daughter to take it out of the pot and cut it in two parts.

"You and I will eat one half of the meat," Kotura said. "As for the other, put it in that wooden dish yonder and take it to the neighbouring choom. Do not enter the choom yourself but stand near it and wait for your dish to be brought out to you."



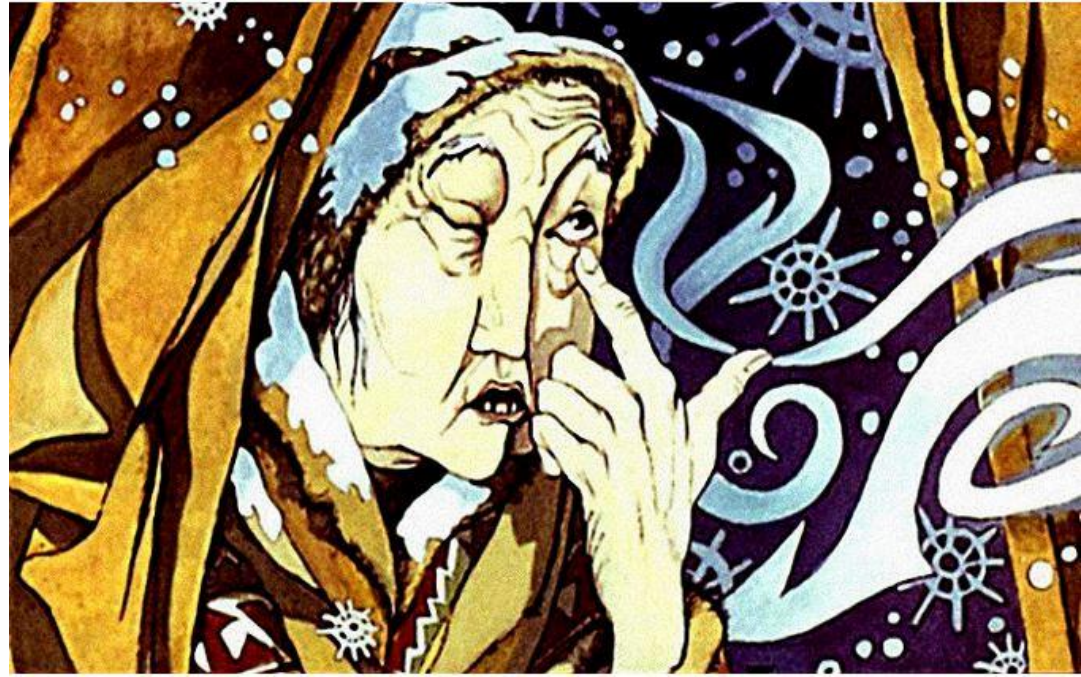
Second Daughter took the meat and went outside. The wind was howling and the snow whirling and it was hard to make out anything. So, not liking to go any farther, she threw the meat in the snow, stood there a while and then went back to Kotura.

"Have you given them the meat?" Kotura asked.

"Yes, I have," Second Daughter replied.

"You have come back very soon. Show me the dish, I want to see what they gave you in return."

Second Daughter did as she was told and Kotura glanced at the empty dish, but said not a word and went to bed.



In the morning he brought in some untanned deerskins and told Second Daughter, just as he had her sister, to make him some new clothes by evening.

"Set to work," he said, "In the evening I will see how well you can sew."

With these words Kotura went off to hunt, and Second Daughter set to work. She was in a great hurry, for somehow she had to get everything done by evening. Suddenly a grey-haired old woman came into the choom.

"A mote has got into my eye, child," she said, "Please take it out. I cannot do it myself."



"I am too busy to bother with your old mote!" Second Daughter replied. "Go away and let me work."

And the old woman looked at her and went away without another word.

It was night when Kotura came back.

"Are my new clothes ready?" he asked.

"Yes, they are," Second Daughter replied.

"Let me try them on, then."

Kotura put on the clothes, and he saw that they were badly cut and much too small and that the seams ran all askew. Kotura flew into a rage, he threw Second Daughter where he had thrown her sister, and she too froze to death.



And the old man sat in his choom with his youngest daughter and wailed in vain for the storm to calm down. The wind was fiercer than ever, and it seemed as if the choom would be blown away any minute.

"My daughters did not heed my words," the old man said, "They have made things worse, they have angered Kotura. You are my last remaining daughter, but still I must send you to Kotura in the hope that he will take you to wife. If I don't, all of our people will perish from hunger. So get ready, daughter, and go."

And he told her where to go and what to do.

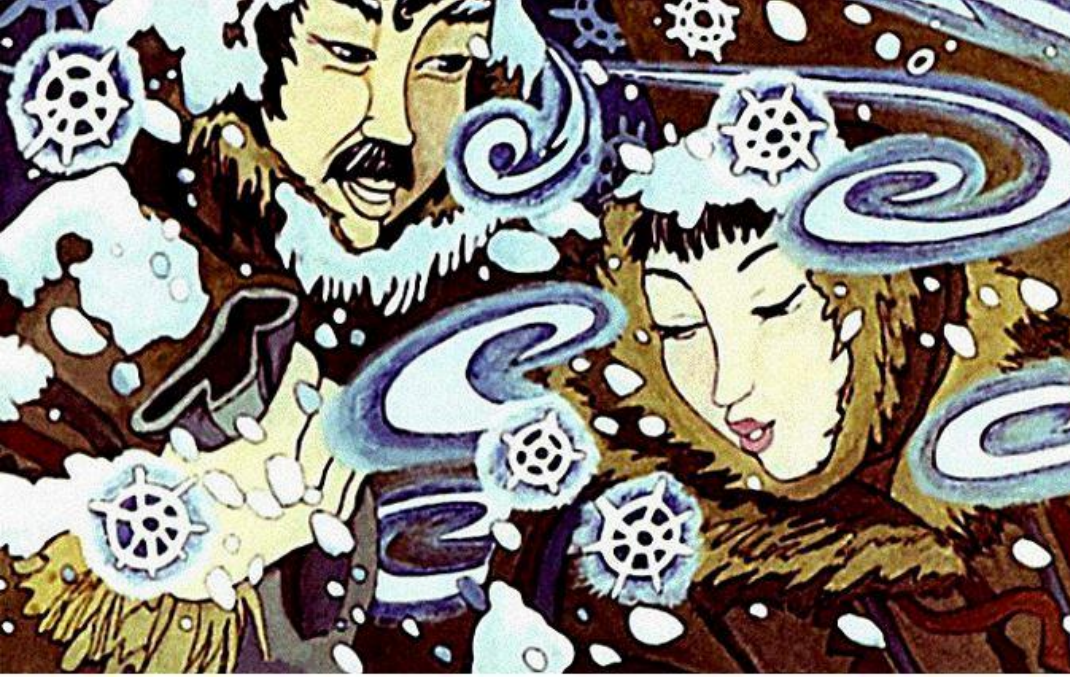


Youngest Daughter came out of the choom, she placed the sledge so that it faced the wind and sent it gliding along with a push. The wind was howling and roaring, trying to throw Youngest Daughter off her feet, and the snow blinded her eyes so that she could see nothing.

But Youngest Daughter plodded on through the blizzard, never forgetting a word of her father's behest and doing just as he had bade. The strings of her coat came undone, but she did not stop to tie them. The snow got into her shoes, but she did not stop to shake it out. It was very cold, and the wind was very strong, but she did not pause and went on and on.



It was only when she came to the mountain and climbed it that she stopped and began shaking the snow out of her shoes and tying the strings of her coat. Then a little bird flew up to her and perched on her shoulder. But Youngest Daughter did not chase the bird away. Instead, she fondled and stroked it tenderly. When the bird flew away Youngest Daughter got into her sledge and coasted down the mountainside straight up to Kotura's choom.



She came into the choom and waited. Suddenly the skin over the entrance was lifted and the young giant came in. When he saw Youngest Daughter he laughed and said:

"Why have you come to me?"

"My father sent me to you," answered Youngest Daughter.

"Why did he do that?"

"To beg you to stop the storm, for if you don't all our people will perish."

"Why do you sit there? Why don't you make up a lire and cook some meat?" Kotura said, "I am hungry, and so must you be too, for I see you have eaten nothing since you came."



Youngest Daughter cooked the meat quickly, took it out of the pot and gave it to Kotura, and Kotura ate some of it and then told her to take half of the meat to the neighbouring choom.

Youngest Daughter took the dish of meat and went outside. The wind was roaring loudly and the snow whirling and spinning. Where was she to go? Where was the choom Kotura told her of to be found? She stood there a while, thinking, and then she started out through the storm, not knowing herself where she was going.



Suddenly there appeared before her the very same little bird that had flown up to her on the mountain and began darting about near her face. Youngest Daughter decided to follow the bird. Whichever way the bird flew, there she went. On and on she walked, and at last saw what looked like a spark flashing a little distance away. Youngest Daughter was overjoyed and went in that direction, thinking that the choom was there.



But when she drew near, she found that what she had thought to be a choom was a mound with smoke curling up from it. Youngest Daughter walked round the mound and prodded it with her foot, and suddenly there, in the side of the mound, she saw a door. It opened before her, and a grey-haired old woman looked out.

"Who are you? Why have you come here?" she asked.

"I have brought you some meat, grandmother," Youngest Daughter replied. "Kotura asked me to give it to you."

"Kotura, you say? Very well, then, let me have it. And you wait here, outside."



Youngest Daughter stood by the mound and waited. She waited a long time. At last the door opened again, and the old woman looked out and handed her the dish. There was something in it, but the girl could not make out what it was. She took the dish and returned with it to Kotura.

"Why were you away so long?" Kotura asked. "Did you find the choom?"

"Yes, I did."

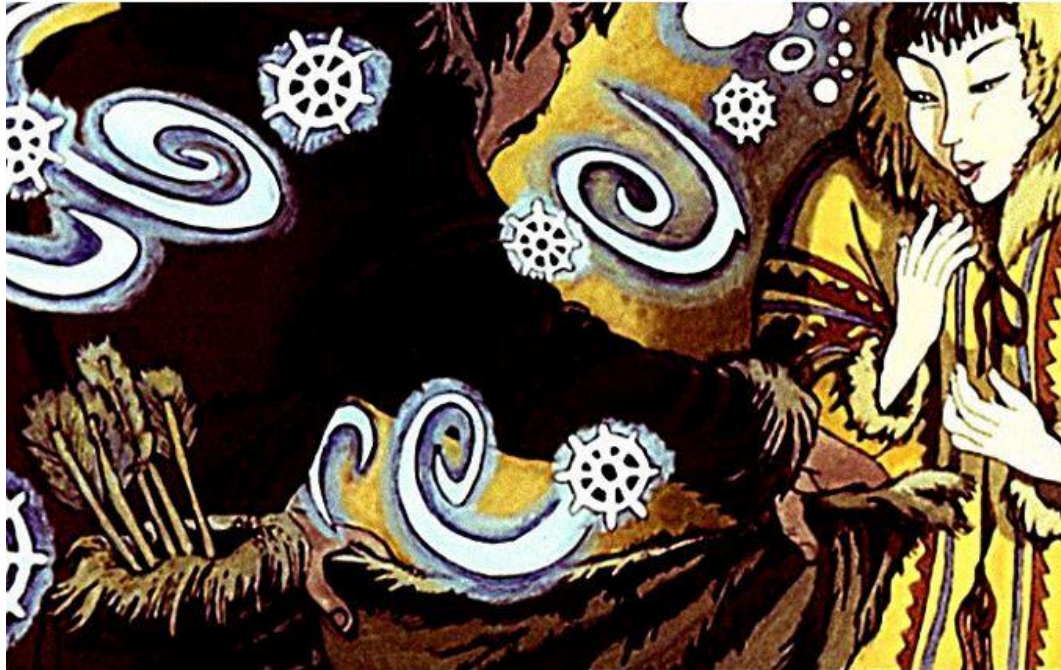
"Did you give them the meat?"

"Yes."

"Let me have the dish, I want to see what is in it."

Kotura looked, and he saw that there were several knives in the dish and also steel needles and scrapers and brakes for dressing skins. Kotura laughed aloud.

"You have received many fine things that will be very useful to you," he said.



In the morning Kotura rose and he brought some deerskins into the choom and ordered Youngest Daughter to make him a new coat, shoes and mittens by evening.

"If you make them nicely," he said, "I will take you to wife."

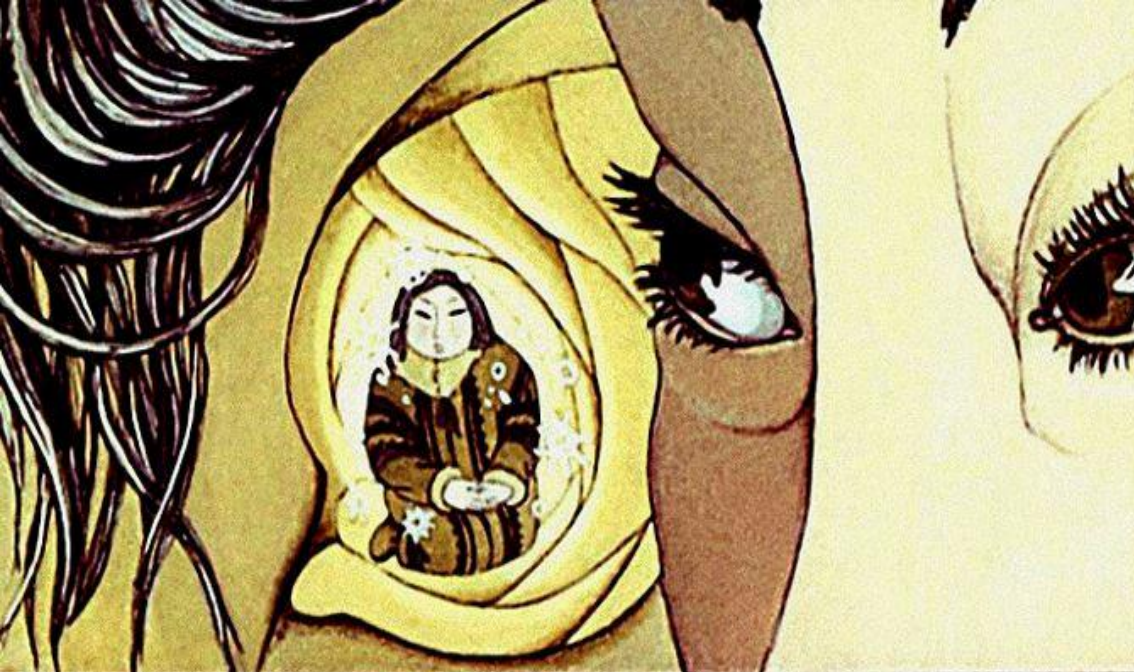


Kotura went away, and Youngest Daughter set to work. The old woman's present proved very useful. Youngest Daughter had everything she needed to make the clothes with. She was not sure that she could do much in a single day, but spent no time thinking about it and tried to do as much as she could. She dressed the skins and she scraped them, she cut and she sewed. All of a sudden the skin over the entrance lifted, and a grey-haired old woman came in. Youngest Daughter knew her at once; it was the same old woman to whom she had taken the meat.



"Help me, my child," the old woman said.
"There's a mote in my eye. Please take it out for me,
I cannot do it myself."

Youngest Daughter did not refuse. She put aside
her work and soon had the mote out of the old
woman's eye.



"Good!" said the old woman. "My eye does not hurt any more. Now look in my right ear."

Youngest Daughter looked in the old woman's ear and started.

"What do you see there?" the old woman asked.

"There is a girl sitting in your ear," Youngest Daughter replied.

"Why don't you call her? She will help you make Kotura's clothes for him."



Youngest Daughter was overjoyed and called to the girl. At her call, not one, but four young girls jumped out of the old woman's ear, and all four set to work. They dressed the skins and they scraped them, they cut and they sewed. The garments were soon ready. After that the old woman hid the four girls in her ear again and went away.



It was evening when Kotura came back.

"Have you done all that I told you to do?" he asked.

"Yes, I have," Youngest Daughter replied.

"Let me see my new clothes, I will try them on."

Youngest Daughter gave him the clothes, and Kotura took them and passed his hand over them the skins were soft and pleasant to the touch. He put on the garments, and they were neither too small nor too large but fitted him well and were made to last. Kotura smiled.

"I like you, Youngest Daughter, and my mother and four sisters like you too," he said, "You work well and you have courage. You braved a terrible storm in order that your people might not perish. Be my wife, stay with me in my choom."



No sooner were the words out of his mouth than the storm in the tundra was stilled. No longer did the people try to hide from the wind, no longer did they freeze. One and all, they came out of their chooms into the light of day!